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Contributed Notes.

The Sinlessness of Christ. St. John VIII. 46. In comparing the life of Jesus Christ with the lives of good and holy men we are as much surprised at what we fail to find as at what we do find.

We look for consciousness of sin, but we do not find any trace of it. From Adam to Malachi this consciousness of sin is painfully manifest in every man's life. No sooner had Adam eaten the forbidden fruit than his own heart condemned him and he hid himself from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. Cain's answer convicted him of murder. Abraham's lying brought a plague upon Pharaoh and upon his house.

Moses was not allowed to enter the promised land on account of his wrong doing and the 90th Psalm is a doleful confession of his transgression against the Lord. David has filled the Psalter with his wailings for his own sinfulness. Solomon too in the dedication of the Temple has the same confession to make. Isaiah cries out in the bitterness of his soul, "I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips and mine eyes have seen the Lord of Hosts." And so on through every page of the Old Testament. There is not one of these holy men free from the consciousness of sin, no not one.

We might hope to find a change in the New Testament. The Christian lives under a new covenant. Old things have passed away, all things have become new. But if we expect to find men free from sin there we are sure to be disappointed. St. John the Baptist founds his gospel on the very fact that men are conscious that they are sinners. His cry is Repent, and this cry finds an echo in countless human hearts. They find in their own breasts the consciousness of sin, and they leave the palaces of Jerusalem and the market-places of Judea and go down to the Jordan to wash and be clean. They carry their accuser in their own bosom, and it is to stifle that accuser's voice they go out to the Baptist. Christ's own apostles are among the number of the self-accused. St. Peter is obliged to say "Depart from me for I am a sinful man O Lord," St. John says "If any man saith he hath no sin, he deceiveth himself and the truth is not in him." St. Paul calls himself the chief of sinners.

The greatest saints of Christendom have been the most ready to confess their sinfulness. Some of them have written books revealing the secrets of their hearts and even in the case of the holiest men these books are not pleasant reading. Modern Christians have made the same confession. "I do not know," says a great Frenchman, "what the heart of a felon is; but I know what the heart of an honest man is and it is awful."

Thomas Erskine of Linlathen says that he would not like to see his own life repeated in another man, and he was one of the most holy and blameless men the nineteenth century has seen.

In turning from the lives of such men to the life of Christ we naturally look for some words of confession on his lips, but we do not find them. We do not find one single expression which can be construed to mean that he was conscious of sin. We would naturally look for this confession in his prayers to God, His Father. The Lord's prayer which he gave to his disciples is prefaced by the words "But thou, when *thou* prayest." "After this manner pray ye."

It is the disciples' prayer. It is a prayer for the use of Christians. It is not the prayer he uses when he is praying for himself and so the words "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us" do not apply to Him.

On the other hand he defies even his enemies to convince him of sin. They have been watching him and trying to entrap him in his talk but they have signally failed. He can look them in the face and challenge them to point out one single error in his public ministry.

He can do more. He can look God in the face and feel confident that the Father finds no fault in him. Has not God manifested his approval in the voice from heaven which said, "This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased?" He can say to his Father "I know that thou hearest me always."

The consciousness of righteousness, the blessedness of the man to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity and in whose spirit there is no guile, this freedom, from the smallest tinge of remorse for sin in thought, in word, in deed, is unique in the history of the world. The holiest men are those who would shrink the most from claiming such exemption. Jesus Christ stands alone. He is the First and the Last who has put forth such a claim from Adam to the present hour.

Another remarkable trait in the character of Jesus Christ is the *absence of Aspiration*.

The most beautiful parts of the Old Testament are the Psalms, and the most beautiful of the Psalms are those in which David lifts himself on the wings of prayer into a holier and a better world. He confesses his sins, but he asks God to purify him, to make him holier and happier and more useful than he has ever yet been. This faculty of aspiration is one of the most spiritual capacities of the heart of man. The best men possess it the most fully. It is the hunger and the thirst after righteousness which Christ himself tells us is blessed for it shall be satisfied. It is that divine discontent with ourselves and the world which weans us from the earth and sets our affections on things above. But while this is necessary for us, it is not necessary and it does not exist in the heart of the Saviour. He does not need to pray to God to make him holy or good. He does not yearn like the saints after heights of virtue that he hath not yet reached. He does not ask the Father to give him strength that he may do his work more faithfully in the future than he has done in the past. On the other hand there is a complete satisfaction with himself and his work. While his disciples are beginning to think that his mission is a failure he knows and feels that everything is being done according to the perfect will of God. He knows and feels that it could not be improved. He has nothing left to hope for. He has nothing to wish for. And so in his communion with his Father he can ask changes to be wrought in the world and among his disciples. But as for himself he only asks that God's will may be done. The ideal and the actual in his life are one and the same. He does not transgress God's law on the one side, and on the other he conforms to it in every point. He does nothing that he ought not to have done, he leaves nothing undone that he ought to have done.

The lives of other men are but fragments. They leave many plans unfulfilled at their decease, and they do many things amiss. But the life of Jesus Christ is a perfect whole. He could say "It is finished" on Calvary. "I came to do thy will O God and I have done it, without transgression, without omission, and now I return home unto Thee."

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